

Middle

CIRCULAR LETTER.

THE
ELDERS AND MESSENGERS
OF THE SEVERAL.
BAPTIST CHURCHES,
MEETING FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AT

{ BIRMINGHAM,
Cannan-Street,
BRITTLE-LANE,
BROAD-OAK,
BROMSGROVE,
COLEFORD,

COPPIE,
COSELEY,
CRADELEY,
EASTCOMBS,
EVESHAM,
LEOMINSTER,

PERSHORE,
RYEFORD,
TEWKESBURY,
UPTON,
AND
WORCESTER,

Having also received LETTERS from
{ BIRMINGHAM, BEWDLEY, WILLENHALL, AND
Bond-Street; BILSTONE, WOLVERHAMPTON.

BEING MET IN

ASSOCIATION AT TEWKESBURY,

June 13th and 14th, 1810;

Maintaining the Independence of their respective Churches ;—and firmly believing the Important Doctrines of Three Equal Persons in the Godhead :—Eternal and Personal Election ;—Original Sin ;—Particular Redemption ;—Free Justification by the Righteousness of Christ imputed ;—Efficacious Grace in Regeneration ; the Final Perseverance of the Saints ;—the Resurrection of the Dead ;—the General Judgment at the Last Day ;—and the Life Everlasting ;

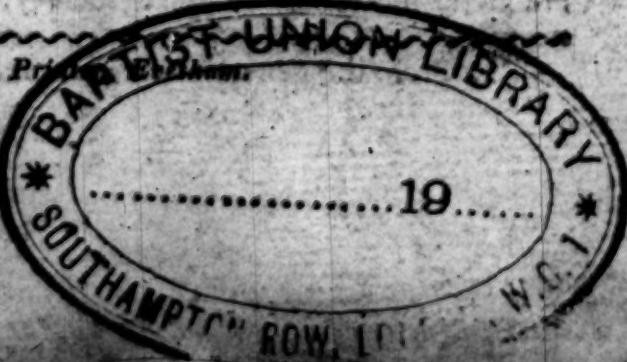
TO THE

SEVERAL SOCIETIES THEY REPRESENT.

DEAR BRETHREN !

THROUGH the tender mercies of our God, we have again met in association, and can say that our minds have been sweetly refreshed in the different exercises of his worship. The states of the respective churches as described in your letters, have past in review before us ; and have been attended with mingled feelings of joy and sorrow ; joy, on hearing of the peace and prosperity of many of them, and sorrow, at the reverse of these, in others.—We have borne you on our hearts to the throne of grace ; and still intreat that you may abound in piety, prudence, patience, and perseverance, in every thing lovely ; that you may study to adorn the holy profession you have made of the gospel of Christ ; and experience the rich anointings of the Spirit of God. And, as one great means of accomplishing these, we would commend to your attention, the serious and interesting subject, proposed for the present letter, viz.—“The necessity and importance of attendance on social prayer meetings.”

J. ABB, Printer, Birmingham.



Prayer is an important branch of religious worship, and of christian duty ; yea, the most solemn in which we can be engaged. In every other religious exercise we are employed in something concerning God ; but here, in speaking immediately to him. How deeply did Abraham feel the solemnity of this work—"Behold, now I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes." Gen. xviii. 27.—And if the holy angels in glory veil their faces before the divine throne ; what sincerity, reverence, and abasement become us, at his feet. "Of all the fruits which faith produces in Christians, genuine prayer is the principal one." We would not doubt of your keeping up a daily intercourse with the throne of grace in secret ; (if prayerless, then graceless) and we are very unwilling to suspect you of neglecting family worship ; for a dreadful imprecation lies upon those families that call not upon God. But it is more especially to united and social prayer, we would now direct your attention ; though meetings for this great business, are commonly thought too lightly of, and neglected by many.—The several directions and exhortations to the churches, to attend to the duty of prayer ; do not regard them merely as individuals, but as bodies and communities, joining together in that service —'The religious meetings of God's people,' says Mr. Henry, 'shall be meetings for prayer, in which they shall join together, as a token of their united faith and mutual love.'—God is pleased to make those who love him, instruments of good to each other, and this is effected in nothing, more, than in social prayer and praise.—As in temporal, so in spiritual things—'Two are better than one,' and by uniting their strength, can perform wonders. It was predicted that in the times of Messiah "It should come to pass, that there should come people, and the inhabitants of many cities ; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts ; I will go also."—Zech. viii. 20, 21.

We have many painful evidences of the great indifference of some of you Brethren, to these meetings ; meetings highly calculated to promote your spiritual prosperity ; the neglect of which, is an awful indication of the declining state of religion in your hearts. You must remember the time, when a deprivation of such an enjoyment, would have grieved your spirit : and now probably you are seeking excuses to quiet your consciences, in withdrawing your attendance on these seasons of grace and times of refreshing. "How is the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed." It too plainly proves a disaffection to the worship of God, a want of zeal and loyalty in the Redeemer's cause, and is a mark of shameful indifference to the enjoyment of the divine presence.

While enforcing the duty of attendance on meetings for social prayer, we will set before you—The *necessity* of these solemn exercises.—We do not even suppose that your attendance on them, is necessary to your salvation ; but, it might be a hard and difficult task to prove, that those who are in a state of salvation, are willing to neglect such meetings ; for that would shew that they are averse to meet with Jesus Christ, or at least, utterly indifferent to communion with him ; which are awful indications of unregeneracy. These meetings appear to be necessary.

1. From the general state of our respective Churches. If here and

there one of these be spiritual and flourishing ; others are languid and cold : little real affection and brotherly love, spirituality and lively zeal toward the interests of Zion, are discovered : this is truly affecting, and especially to a tender mind. Who, that feels his soul alive to God, is sensible of his obligation to the free, sovereign grace of God in Christ Jesus, and has any concern for the honour of Christ ; can view these things with indifference ? " When the state of God's Church is very low and very helpless, it is proper to be recommended by our prayers to God's pity." Brethren, let us each consider that the influence of example is great ; that one who treats meetings for social prayer with coolness, may influence others to do the same ; few will then ' come to the help of the Lord, against the mighty ;' and thus the hands of Ministers, and others, who are hearty friends ; are weakened.—Therefore saith Paul, ' Now I beseech you, Brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, & for the love of the spirit, that ye strive together with me, in *your* prayers to God for me.' Rom. xv. 30. " What reason have Christians to expect ordinances to be beneficial ; the church with which they stand connected to prosper ; or the labours of their Pastors to be blest, while social prayer is neglected ? " Again ; the example of one who is steady, lively, and devotional in his attendance here, may influence many ; and when the coals enkindled are brought near together, they burn more strongly, and send forth a greater heat. If we have any genuine concern for the prosperity of the Redeemer's cause, let us shew it, by a diligent, conscientious, and lively regard to social prayer meetings. An indisposition to these, is always an unfavourable symptom.

2. From the state of our own souls as individuals, this service is necessary.

Who among us can say, we have as much personal religion as we need, as we desire ?—that we can now sit down and live upon our old stock, without the farther use of means ?—that we have completely conquered every evil of the heart—that we have encouraged the Brethren in the ways and work of the Lord, and have sought the interest of Christ, as much as we *ought* to do ? And yet, such is the language of the conduct, when the ordinances of God are unnecessarily neglected (and that of social prayer, is the life of every other)—No, Brethren, we still feel that we are lamentably defective in every grace ;—are still in an enemies' country, and still need an increase of love, zeal, strength and devotedness to God : hence, we need the advice, co-operation and prayers of each other ; and how shall we enjoy these more, than at such meetings ?—' The Children of Israel said to Samuel—cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines.' Thus let us unite in prayer for each other.

3. From the example of old and new Testament Saints, we may argue the necessity of social prayer.

It has been the practice of the people of God in every age, to meet together for serious and solemn prayer, both on particular emergencies, and when any great and public blessing was to be sought. And when do the churches appear more amiable, or formidable, than when they imitate such noble and pious examples ? then indeed, they resemble the church of old ; " Fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners ! Thus, when Jehoshaphat King of Judah,

was threatened with war from some of the surrounding nations. "He feared and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah—And Judah gathered themselves together to ask *help* of the Lord: even out of all the Cities of Judah they came to seek the Lord." 2 Chron. xx. 3. 4.—Had they been indolent and indisposed, they might have pleaded in excuse, the trouble of going up to Jerusalem; "We can each of us seek the Lord at home in private, without the fatigue and inconveniences of going so far," but no, they saw the need of united, and earnest prayer, in their present trouble. We, Brethren, can easily meet together in our respective societies, for solemn prayer and praise, with little or no inconvenience. Again, Ezra, and those who went up with him from Babylon. "Sought of God a *right way* for them."—So; after the resurrection of Christ, the Apostles returned to Jerusalem and continued with one accord in prayer and supplication with the Women, &c. Acts i. 14. "And when Paul and Barnabas had ordained Elders in the Churches they visited, and had prayed with fasting; they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed." Can any among us read these portions and speak, or even think lightly of meetings for social prayer?—And, Paul, bound for Jerusalem; having landed at Tyre, says, "And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way, and they all brought us on our way, with Wives and Children, till we were out of the City; and we kneeled down on the shore and prayed" Acts xxi. 5. And again, when Peter was kept in prison; prayer was made without ceasing of the Church, unto God for him. "And when he had considered *the thing* he came to the house of Mary the Mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying." Acts xiii. 5. 12.—Such precedents, Brethren, have the force of command in them—it is commendable to imitate the best models.—Can any pretend to plead, that these meetings are not equally necessary or advantageous now, as at any former period? Surely not; unless they can prove that we are not equally exposed to evil, that we have not so much sin to lament, as those who have gone before us; and that the divine presence and blessing are not so interesting now, as then; which none will undertake to prove. It has been remarked that when the most High was about to confer any special favour on his people, it has usually been preceded by a spirit of prayer—"As soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children."

4. From divine injunction we argue the necessity of united, social prayer—God has intimately connected the means and the end in all things. "Seek the Lord and his strength, seek his face continually." 1 Chron. xvi. 11. The divine will, as revealed in his word, we all avow to be the rule of our faith, and practice; and are often expressing a wish for greater conformity to that will; but let us beware of glaring contradiction in our conduct. God's command is an end of all strife; nor can this be wilfully disregarded, without incurring guilt, which will obscure our evidence of interest in his favour. Israel was commanded in their captivity "to seek the peace of the city whither God had caused them to be carried away captives, and to pray unto the Lord for it, for in the peace thereof, they should have peace." And the Redeemer, looking on multitudes that were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd, saith unto his Disciples—"The harvest truly is plen-

feous, but the labourers are few—pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." Matt. ix. 37. 38. And on another occasion—"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." Mark xiii. 33.—The church at Colloffe was thus admonished "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving" Chap. iv. 2—And the Apostles writing to the Hebrews, says, "And let us consider one another to provoke unto love, and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is; but exhorting *one another*, and so-much the more, as ye see the day approaching." These, Brethren, unitedly shew the necessity of a strict, regular, and devout attendance on meetings for social prayer.

We will now farther state to you, the *importance* of giving attendance to these solemn exercises.

1. It is in meetings for social prayer, if properly and seriously discharged, that the life of God is particularly promoted in the soul. This Apostle Jude seems to have respect to the importance of this duty, when he exhorts thus, "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,—Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." V. 21, 22.—And is not the life of God an object of unspeakable moment with every truly regenerate person? It is for want of a greater experience of this privilege, we sometimes complain to a fellow christian—retire from the sanctuary at the close of the sabbath, with grief; and mourn in secret before God. The life of God, which is a sense of the favour and love of God in Christ Jesus, is the joy of the soul—the strengthener of every grace of the Holy Spirit in the heart; as faith, hope, love, patience, humility, submition, &c.—And this is greatly promoted in meeting for united prayer. Here, the variety of gift with which the blessed God furnishes his servants, is manifested; and is highly suited to meet the feelings and wishes of all his people present—thus, hope is revived and encouraged, and the life of God in the soul increased.

2. It is in these meetings, in a special manner, that the divine presence is enjoyed—To encourage his disciples in this practice, the Redeemer says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."—And which of us does not profess to esteem this blessing? What is it that tranquillizes the soul amidst the boisterous storms of life: sweetens the spirit, and calms the turbulent passions of the breast? What is it fortifies the mind beneath the greatest pressures—assists with ease to repel the strongest temptations; makes the word, the sabbaths, the ordinances of God, a delight; and inspires a relish for every part of his work? Is it not a sense of the divine presence?—Call to remembrance, Brethren, former days and seasons, when you have united in social, fervent prayer; the doors being shut—the small still voice has secretly whispered, saying, "Peace be unto you!" Have not your feelings resembled those of the disciples on the mount of transfiguration, with their Lord? And you have said, "It is good to be here"—Did you not then view such exercises as interesting indeed? With what pleasure and fervour of Spirit, have you gone to unite with fellow christians, in supplicating the divine presence and blessing;—nor would you have lost an opportunity: but ah! what

has effected such a change now so visible in some of you? The divine presence equally attends his praying servants now, as at any former period, when they meet in obedience to his will. It was when the disciples were assembled together and prayed, "that the place where they were, was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost." If alive to our own best interests, hither shall we esteem it a privilege to come.

3. It is here that brotherly love is increased, and that we most fully resemble the saints above in their worship. Social worship comes nearest to that of heaven—"It tends greatly," says one, "to maintain brotherly love, and to bring down blessings on families and societies." Here we meet as branches of the same family, governed by the same head; our interests, hopes, and aims are one. Those who appear reserved, and disposed to say little in conversation, here unfold themselves, and shew that their affections and desires, are in union with those of their Brethren. It is here that the believer pours out his soul in solemn and unreserved prayer to God—Here, the weak and timid Brother is strengthened:—he sees in the supplications of the best of saints, that they are sifted and buffeted like himself;—that they are subjects of the same complaints, the same wants and desires with himself: and that, "as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man":—hence, he gains encouragement, and feels his heart more knit in love to the Brethren: thus christian friendship and fellowship abound. It is in this exercise that we feel more especially our connection with the whole church of God—that we see ourselves separated from the world; embracing the same sentiments, walking in the same way, seeking the same end; and feel our hearts glow with love to each other.—Thus we become as gardens, flourishing, beautiful and fruitful. "The religious affections are generally more lively in relative and united, than in solitary and separate exercises. In devout company engaged in the same act of worship, the coldest heart will kindle; while the fervent will glow with a still brighter flame, the devotional spirit will strike into every heart, and animate all with one common ardour."

4. God has crowned these meetings with the increase of his Zion.—He has ordained social prayer as the means through which great and public blessings should be obtained by his people. The primitive christians "continued stedfastly in the Apostles doctrine, &c. and in prayers, and the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." Brethren, are our hearts set upon the prosperity of Zion; do we wish to see her "cords lengthened, and her stakes strengthened?" Are we anxious to hail her triumphs over infidelity, iniquity and superstition?—Have we neighbours, friends, near relatives and children, who are strangers to renewing grace?—And will not this stimulate us unitedly to cry—"Save now, we beseech thee O Lord: O Lord we beseech thee send now prosperity?" When we consider the infinite importance of the salvation of souls; and the increase of truth and righteousness in the earth.—When we reflect on the numerous millions of our apostate race, who are enveloped in the grossest ignorance of the true God; and the numbers that are constantly perishing in this ignorance; shall we think much of employing an hour or two in a week, in social and fervent prayer, "that knowledge may run to and fro and increase?"

Shall we think much of any effort, time, or cost, that may issue in the good of men and the increase of Zion? Look at the servants of sin, the votaries of dissipation and folly; do they spare any pains or cost; do they think much of a little time; are they disunited, cool and indifferent, in the pursuit of their projects; or the promotion of their schemes? And what is the issue of their success? The seduction of souls into sin, and to inevitable ruin! "The children of this world are in their generation, wiser than the children of light." Considering what God has done, and can do for Zion, in answer to prayer—let us take encouragement, O "give him no rest, until he make Jerusalem a joy and a praise throughout the whole earth"—Pray for the peace of Jerusalem, they shall prosper that love thee.

5. To these, the divine promise is made.

There are no meetings of his people, on which the blessed God looks with greater complacency, than on those for serious, united and fervent prayer; there, in a peculiar manner, he loves to dwell;—and has often in his providence, shewn his approbation of them. It was foretold, that when the time for Israel's deliverance from the babylonian captivity, should draw nigh. "Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" Jer. xxix. 12. 13. And, see the declaration by another Prophet—"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer, and while they are yet speaking, I will hear."—Again, "thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this, be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. I will increase them with men—like a flock"—"Promises are given, not to supersede, but to quicken and encourage prayer"—And the Redeemer said to his Disciples—"Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. xviii. 19. "And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. xxi. 22. What has not been effected by united supplication at a throne of grace! It has great power and prevalence with God, for the removal, or prevention of evil things, and for the obtaining of blessings.—God delivered Peter from prison and from death, in answer to the prayers of his church.—And, Paul says, I know that this shall turn to my salvation, through your prayers and the supply of the spirit of Jesus Christ.—Indifference towards these meetings then, betrays an indifference toward the general state of our respective churches:—the example of old and new Testament Saints:—the divine command:—the promotion of personal religion:—the gracious presence of God, as enjoyed herein:—the increase of brotherly love:—the interests of Zion, and the promise of God.—Those of you Brethren, who habitually neglect such meetings, how can you acquit yourselves of guilt before God: and what ideas are we to form of your personal religion? Your love to the cause of Christ; to your Brethren; or your regard to the divine word on this head?—"A Son honoureth his Father, and a Servant his Master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honour? and if I be a Master, where is my fear?" Mal. i. 6.—Do you object, that you have not time? Ask yourselves, whether you have *really* a desire to attend them? If there be a will, surely, there will be sometimes a way. And would it not be possible

to redeem an hour or two in a week, by observing a little different conduct in some things? Yea, if our love to the Redeemer be ardent, shall we not be willing to make some small sacrifices for the sake of enjoying his gracious presence? It becomes us to beware of the awful delusion, while tempted to seek excuses for the neglect of religious duties, lest it should drown our souls in everlasting perdition! The danger from this source is exceedingly great! Cannot some of you find time to go frequently to some other, than your usual place of worship to hear a sermon; and this, to the neglect of social meetings with those friends, to whom you have voluntarily and solemnly surrendered yourselves, to walk with them "in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless." Thus acting, you violate your covenant engagements with the societies of which you stand members; and leave them to pray and seek the divine blessing alone. We have no wish to prevent your hearing the word occasionally elsewhere—but if even by this you must neglect meetings at your own places, and cannot conveniently find time for both, tis easy to see where duty calls. Suppose all the members were to follow your example, what would become of social prayer meetings?—You know not what you lose by neglect; others have, there, experienced many a gracious visit from the Saviour. Do you object to some one or more who are in the habit of engaging at these meetings, (though their moral conduct be unimpeachable)—or that you would attend, if you yourselves were not requested to engage? But ah! this indicates that it is not well with your soul. Beware of pride, look from the people in such an exercise; consider the all seeing eye of God, and sincerely and fervently pour out your soul before him.

Thus, we urge your attendance from the preceding considerations; but more, from the benefit that will result to those who are present. Let no one of you say, "There is nothing that so poor a creature as I am, could express in prayer, that would benefit any one." But remember, that the blessed God makes use of some of the most weak and feeble instruments for accomplishing great good. But, if you engage not, your presence there looks well, encourages others, and appears as if you felt some interest in the cause of Christ; whereas your opposite conduct may be discouraging to many around you. Tis highly culpable in you to suffer either visits of pleasure, or friendship to detain you from attending here;—consider, God, has the first claim.

We farther urge you, from the speedy flight of time, the rapid approach of death! Time, with you is short! Death, is at hand!—Then you will never more be of any advantage on earth, either by engaging, or by your presence in prayer with your brethren. If you take no pleasure in praying with the children of God here, can you expect the pleasure of praising with them above? If you would, experience a greater relish for the things of God; bear your trials with sweet submission to the divine will; enjoy the communion of saints in a more elevated degree; see the interest of Christ flourish around you; or possess much of heaven upon earth; we earnestly recommend your regular, and conscientious attendance on meetings for social prayer.

Permit us to address a few words to those of you, Brethren, who take the lead at these exercises. And here, we entreat you to look well to your temper and conduct, that they be irreproachable before men; or, your prayers, however well expressed, will never be accepted.

able either to God or Man. And we advise you to beware of preaching in your prayers; of too familiar a mode of talking, or prescribing to the divine Being.—Avoid all affectation & bombast; all disputation and reflection upon others, whether present or absent. “The wrath of Man worketh not the righteousness of God,” and especially not in the solemn work of prayer. Avoid the constant mentioning of one or more of the divine names; such a repetition has the appearance of irreverence, and is often painful to some pious minds. Moreover, it is pretty commonly objected (and not without cause) that some of our friends who engage in prayer are too long, and tedious; by this means, the favour of such meetings evaporates, they become less interesting, and thinly attended; and some are detained too long from other duties. If you are concerned for the life and prosperity of prayer meetings, be generally short. A few warm, pious petitions, are unspeakably more interesting, and tend to keep up devotion, much more, than a long prayer, though there were variety in it (which is seldom the case, where it is always long.) “Let thy words be few.” Eccles. v. 2. Two, or three might engage frequently, where there is only one. If these hints be practically regarded, we shall soon see a wide difference in our prayer meetings; nor shall we have reason to complain, as we have done, either for want of favour, or attendance.

Signed by the Moderator,

D. TROTMAN.

BREVIATES.

WEDNESDAY afternoon, met at three o'clock, Brother Trotman read the Circular Letter. Met again at six in the evening, Brother Cave introduced the service by prayer; the letters from the Churches were read, and Brother Hawkins concluded with prayer.

THURSDAY morning, at six o'clock assembled for prayer, Brethren Price, Lakelin, Dean Gibbs, and Belther were engaged in leading the devotion of the worshippers. At half past ten, the public services were introduced with reading the scriptures and prayer by Brother Winterbotham (of Horsley) Brother Cave preached from Gal. v. 17. *For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, &c.* and Brother Kilpin, from 1 Thess. iv. 3. first part. *This is the will of God, even your sanctification.* And Brother Butterworth concluded with prayer. In the evening at six o'clock Brother Davis introduced the service by prayer; Brother Coles of Bourton; preached from Ezra x. 4. *Arise, for this matter belongeth*

unto thee, &c. and Brother Winterbotham from Luke xi. 9. 13. *And it shall be given you, &c.* and concluded the highly interesting and impressive services of the association with prayer. A day long to be remembered with sacred pleasure by many who were present.

STATE OF THE CHURCHES.

INCREASE.

By Baptism 130
By Letters 13
Restored 3

DECREASE.

By Death 29
By Dismission 26
By Exclusion 42

Total increase this Year 49.

Number of members in the churches 1596.

Resolved, that the next Association be held at Bromsgrove; on the Tuesday and Wednesday in the Whitsun-week; the circular letter will be read on Tuesday at 3 o'clock, and the lectures from the minstres at six, in the evening. Brethren Butterworth, Belcher and Draper to preach, in case of failure, Brethren Rowland and Trotman.

N. B. Please to put up at the Crown Inn.

That the Quarterly Meetings be held at
Ryeford, last Tuesday in July.
Coseley, the 12th of September.
Upton, first Tuesday after the Easter week.

That the Subject for the next association letter be, "The nature and advantages of self-denial."

That the Baptist Magazine be recommended to our friends as an interesting and useful work.

The Churches where the Double Lectures are held, are expected to write to the Ministers whom they choose to preach and dismiss, one month before the time.

Collected for the association Fund for Village preaching, &c. £30 5s 5d and divided the same to 21 persons engaged in that service.

Two of these withdrew themselves from some difference of opinion, yet still remain in the association and receive their stipend, now

F I N I S H.